

BLINDNESS AMONG 6,000
ADULTS

H. D. Lamb, M. D.

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By

H. D. LAMB, M.D.

ST. LOUIS, MO.

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BLINDNESS AMONG 6,000 ADULTS

H. D. LAMB, M.D.

ST. LOUIS

The granting of a pension for the blind in Missouri has afforded the opportunity for obtaining statistics on large numbers of adult blind. Such statistics are valuable, for there exist in this country no worthwhile figures on large numbers of blind. The United States census of the blind is worthless. The only valuable statistics are those of Magnus, a prominent German ophthalmologist who published in 1883 the causes of blindness in 2,528 cases of bilateral blindness.

From June, 1921, to June, 1923, a pension of \$25 a month was granted to every resident of Missouri, 21 or more years of age with an income of not more than \$780 a year whose vision in each eye was not better than 20/450 with or without correcting lenses.

In 1922¹ there was published the cause of blindness, vision, age and sex in 3,910 individuals; this was the number of applicants asking for the pension up to about February 1, 1922. In the present report, similar tables are given on the entire number (5,927) applying up to June, 1923.

In Tables No. 1 and No. 2, the number of cases are noted in terms of eyes, because in many individuals the cause of blindness in one eye is different from that in the other eye. The percentage in Table No. 1 for each cause of blindness is figured on the number under each cause as examined by eye specialists. Practically all the cases of injury were examined by specialists.

TABLE NO. 1 CAUSES OF BLINDNESS

Causes	Eyes examined by oculist Number	Eyes examined by general physician Number	Cause of blindness Per Cent.
Trachoma	1,937	497	20.3
Cataract	1,720	713	18.0
Optic atrophy	1,252	120	13.0
Cornical ulceration	1,016	272	10.6
Glaucoma	904	149	9.5
Uveitis	524	48	5.5
Simple trauma	485		5.1
Trauma with sympathetic ophthalmia	152		1.6
Chorioretinitis and choroiditis	278	8	2.9
Ophthalmia neonatorum ..	183	13	2.0
Pigmentary degeneration of retina	154	22	1.6
Progressive myopia	119	5	1.2
Optic neuritis and neuroretinitis	104	48	1.1
Congenital malformations..	74		0.8
Congenital cataract	50	8	0.5
Acid, lime and lye burns..	44		0.5
Retinal detachment	36	1	0.4
Pterygium	27	11	0.3
Postocular amblyopia	20		0.2
Parenchymatous keratitis..	18		0.2
Keratacoms	18	4	0.2
Essential shrinking of conjunctiva	10		0.1

Amblyopia ex anopsia.....	10		0.1
Hemorrhagic retinitis	9		0.1
Albino	8	2	0.1
Albuminuric retinitis	8	4	0.1
Cancer	8		0.1
Choked disc	6		
Wood alcohol	4	2	
Miscellaneous causes	13		0.1
Fundus condition (obscured by lens changes).....	123	17	1.3
No diagnosis	242	348	2.5
Total eyes	9,560	2,294	
Total cases	4,780	1,147	100.0
Per cent.	80.7	19.3	
Altogether	5,927 cases or 100.0%		

The realization of how important a factor in causing blindness was trachoma, as revealed in the 1922 statistics, caused the State Board of Health in 1922 under the leadership of Dr. E. P. North, to make a special effort to combat it. The aid of the United States Public Health Service was obtained and a trachoma hospital established at Rolla, Mo. Traveling trachoma clinics were also sent out over the southern counties of the state.

The diagnosis of cataract is so often made where cataract has secondarily occurred in an eye previously blinded from another cause that the high percentage of cataract in Table No. 1 is of no great significance.

Optic atrophy is much the most frequent single cause of blindness in St. Louis and Kansas City, producing 22.8 per cent. of the blindness in these two metropolises. Syphilis is answerable for most (perhaps 75 per cent.) of optic atrophy, so the fight on venereal disease cannot be too much agitated.

TABLE NO. 2 CAUSES OF TRAUMA

Destructive agent	Eyes injured by simple trauma Number	Eyes injured by trauma and sympathetic ophthalmia Number	Per Cent.
Dynamite and gunpowder explosion	154		24.2
Gunshot	93	4	15.2
Wood (kindling and chips) ..	31	2	5.2
Knife	6	26	5.1
Tree (twigs and branches) ..	21	10	4.8
Stick	20	10	4.6
Nail	8	18	4.0
Steel (flying particle).....	15	6	3.4
Rock	11	6	2.7
Dynamite cap and gun cap Explosions (other than above)	15		2.4
.....	13		2.0
Fall	11	2	2.0
Corn stalk	5	8	2.0
Blows	6	6	2.0
Missiles	6	4	1.6
Scissors	3	4	1.1
Toy cannon	5		0.8
Kick	3	2	0.8
Glass	4		0.6
Wire	4		0.6
Miscellaneous objects	21	26	7.4
Unknown	30	18	7.5
Totals	485	152	100.0
Per Cent.	76.1%	23.9%	

¹ Journal of American Medical Association, 79:1305, 1922.

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TABLE NO. 3. VISION

Vision	Number of cases	Percentage of cases
O and light perception	3,060	51.6
Light perception to 10/450.....	1,652	27.9
10/450 to 20/450.....	1,018	17.2
Not given accurately	197	3.3
Totals	5,927	100.

TABLE NO. 4. AGE

Age	Number of cases	Percentage of cases
From 20 to 30 years.....	257	4.3
30 to 40 years	474	8.0
40 to 50 years	683	11.5
50 to 60 years	901	15.2
60 to 70 years	1,403	23.7
70 to 80 years	1,370	23.2
80 to 90 years	700	11.8
90 to 100 years	125	2.1
100 and over	14	0.2
Totals	5,927	100.0

76.2% of the total number are 50 years old and over.

TABLE NO. 5. SEX

Sex	Number of cases	Percentage of cases
Male	3,197	54.0
Female	2,730	46.0
Totals	5,927	100.0

The amount of blindness in a county varied from 1 among 213 inhabitants to 1 among 1831 residents; the ratio in St. Louis City was 1 to 1211 and in Kansas City 1 to 1262; the average for the state was 1 to 574.

CONCLUSIONS

No claim for accuracy can be made for the foregoing figures but as indicators they are valuable. At least they are much the best statistics extant for this state and better than those for any other state which must depend upon the altogether inaccurate United States Census for the Blind. There can be no effective prevention of blindness until there are accurate statistics of the causes of blindness.

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